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BLAZER

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Sunday, March 26, 1972 THE HERALD, Provo, Utah—Page 3A

... For Provo's Leading Industry

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were soaring 100 feet into the air, and heavy machinery came crashing through the building's crumbling floors.

Although workers and citizens worked feverishly to save everything they could, many of the most costly and technical machines were firmly attached to the floor, making their rescue virtually impossible.

Who Called The Alarm...

There is still some question as to who sounded the first fire alarm.

The Provo Post of that day states that it was Grant Eggertsen who "sounded the wild cry of 'fire'" by calling the fire department at 11:30 a.m.

local citizens who notified the fire department.

La France to the Rescue

In response to the frantic call, the department quickly rolled its first motor drawn fire apparatus, a 750 gallon Pumper truck built by the American La France Company, to the scene. The men called the large machine the old "Seven Fifty." It had right-hand drive and hard rubber tires.

Unfortunately, it didn't have any water. And there wasn't any in the old mill stream near the factory either. It was all being used for irrigation.

The Post gives the following account of what happened that day:

"The call for help was

destruction in the conflagration. The machines in the cutting and pattern rooms were carried out as were the tables and all other materials that might feed the fire."

Over and over, city Police Chief Jesse Manwaring ran to fire station to ring the fire bell and call forth more help.

The Fire Chief at the time was Joseph Loveless. Regular firemen included Don Parks, Reed Boshard, David A. "Bert" Peay, and Clarence Duke.

After seven hours the fire was under control, but firemen were never able to get water directed to the main buildings.

Weaving and Carding Rooms Saved

Fortunately the weaving and carding rooms were saved, and

eventually strung to the mill, and everything was soaked that could be soaked.

After the fire, tons of soaked wool which had been stored in the buildings warehouses was strung across the ground to dry. In fact, Victor Bird reports that wool was even scattered to dry on the floor of the old Tabernacle on Center Street.

After the fire, five buildings lay in smoldering blackened ruins.

Smoke Stack Still Stands...

In the middle of it all, the one hundred foot smoke stack for the plant was still left standing. It can still be seen today in the center of town, where it has been redecorated to mark its new position as advertiser for the P.E. Ashton Company.

the actual figure, the fire meant destruction for the plant.

Because of it, the mills were unable to complete the government contract, and the tons of wool which they had bought for seventy cents a pound went to no use. When they were finally able to use and sell it after the war, the price of wool had dropped to thirty cents.

End of Hope

As fire department records report, "Some worker's fathers and grandfathers had worked in the mills, and they had been looking forward to having their children make their livelihood there also. Knowing this means of support had vanished was a major blow to a great many families."

Company.

Fitting Foundation

It is a silent and fitting reminder of the foundation of history and tradition on which Provo has been built.

During the height of the fire, the old mill whistle, which had sounded the time of day for so many years throughout the city of Provo, became activated by the heat of the blaze.

The old whistle had formerly blown four times a day to let people know when to come to work, when lunchtime had arrived, and when the day was over.

Now, under the fire's intense heat, it blew one shrill scream, loudly and then continued softly. Then for a long period of time it continued its mournful song as if

time, Clayton Jenkins, reminisces that the number of people who claim to have called the fire department on that historic day has grown faster than the names of families who claim to have come over on the Mayflower.

He adds, "There just weren't that many phones in the building."

It has been established, however, that Mr. Jenkins and Victor J. Bird were two other

and boys. Every man who could assist was on the job. The Denver and Rio Grande sent a special train up to the mills with its section and yard men. Long before the flames had reached the main building, every bolt of cloth and every pound of available wool and yarn that could be reached safely was carried out and stored for safe keeping.

"However, the machinery could not be moved and went to

Jenkins reports that this was the deciding factor in Jesse Knight's decision to rebuild the mill.

While the blaze continued, the city's police force rode through town asking people to turn off their water in order to build up pressure to fight the fire.

Provo Mayor at the time was LeRoy Dixon, and shortly after the fire he issued a proclamation congratulating the firemen and local citizens on their efforts.

Five lines of hose were

Despite all efforts, the fire had struck a fatal blow to the mill. It would never really recover.

Total loss for the fire is recorded at around \$369,000 in fire department records. However, the newspapers of the day and the records of Mrs. Jennie Knight Mangum, Jesse Knight's youngest daughter, list the actual loss at \$504,000.

Only \$138,245 was insured by the firm. That places the real loss at \$365,755. But whatever

machinery which had produced top quality wool for many years had all sunk into the basement of the main buildings and melted into a ruined heap.

Tons and tons of this once-valuable machinery were merely plowed under and covered over with dirt when the factory was eventually rebuilt. The machinery still lies there today, underneath what has now become the P.E. Ashton

playing its own requiem. This "swan song" of the whistle, and the building, brought people from miles around to come and witness the tragic burning.

The fire burned fiercely for four or five hours, and flames could still be seen at sundown.

The fire, and the mournful whistle that accompanied it, marked the end of an era of the woolen industry in Provo.



WHEN WATER WAS FINALLY FOUND, tons of wool that had been stored in the mill for war production was soaked clear through during the blaze. This wool was later spread over the ground and on the floor of the old

Provo Tabernacle to dry. The loss for the fire was estimated at \$504,000, or well over double that figure in today's dollars. It was without question the greatest destruction by fire in Provo's history.



TONS OF MELTED EQUIPMENT AND A LONELY TOWER were the ruined remainders of the deadly blaze. The old smokestack has now been placed in retirement. Used actively by the plant for

almost half a century, it is now a decorator piece, and sports a bright coat of paint as an advertiser for the P. E. Ashton firm to remind local citizens that business is still alive and well in Provo.